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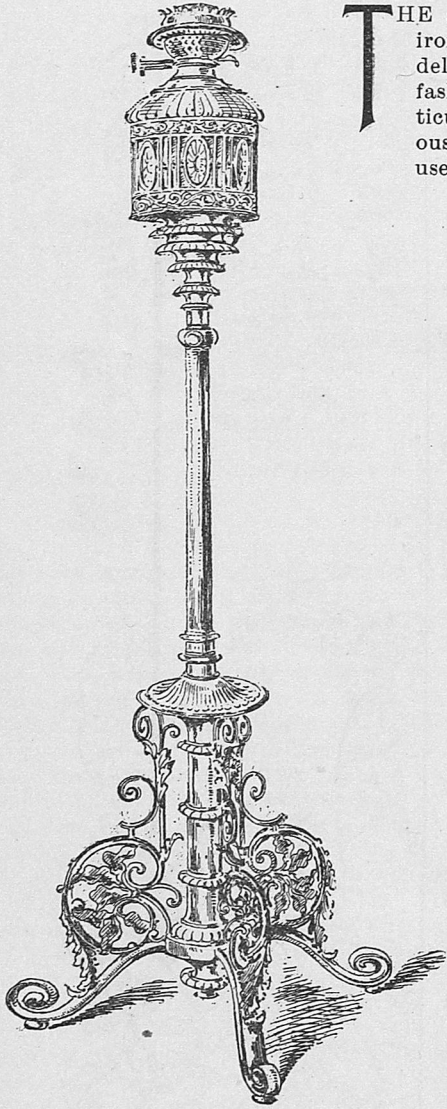
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ORNAMENTAL IRON WORK.

By JAMES CARRUTHERS.

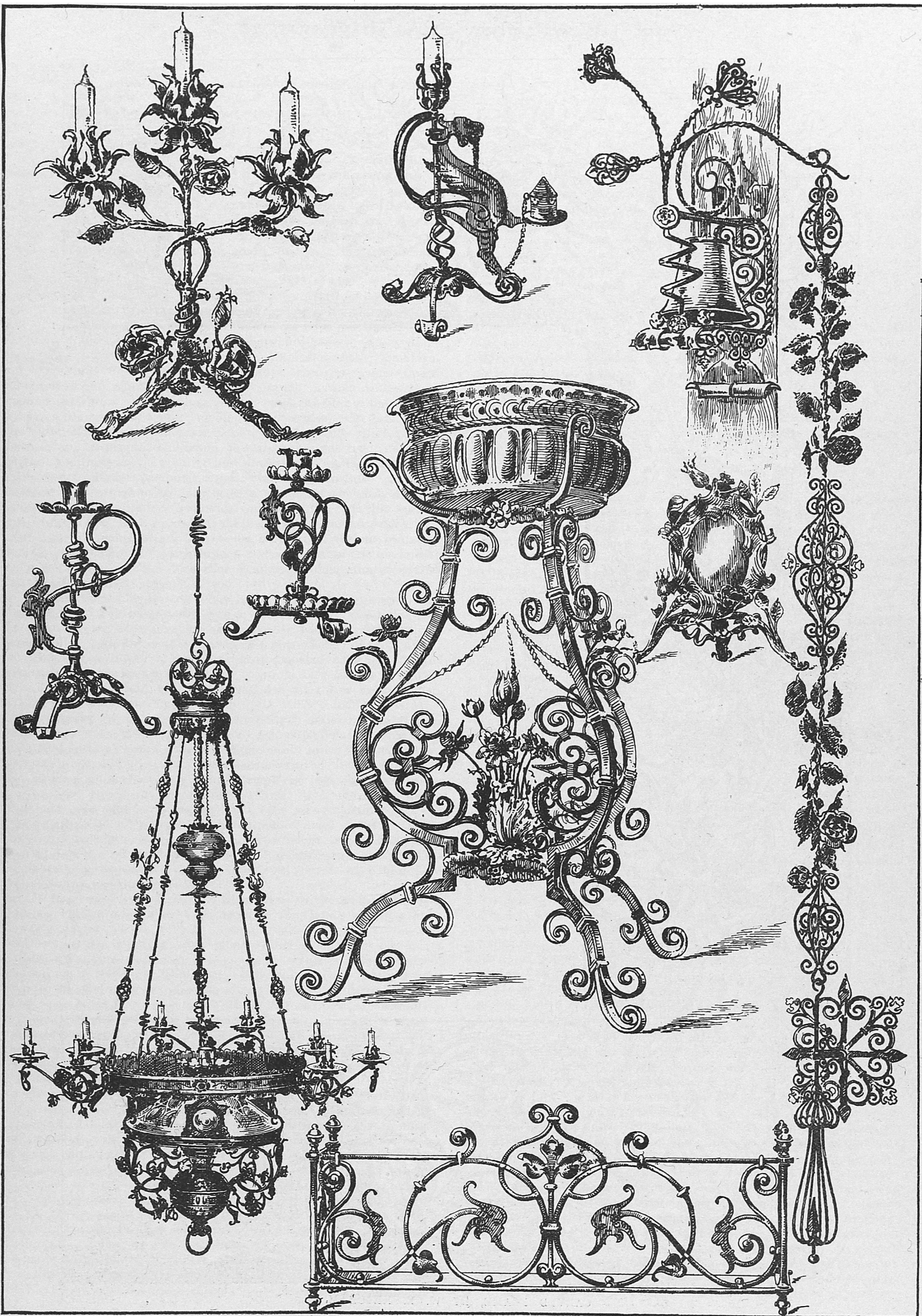


THE adaptability of wrought iron for receiving the most delicate forms of artistic fashioning renders it particularly applicable to various articles of household use as well as for interior decoration. It admits of every intricacy of form suitable to the designers' purpose, separate parts being welded, or riveted. This ornamental application of iron has not been so extensive in this country as its decorative capacities justify, but there is a growing liking for the special characteristics of this metal when worked in artistic forms. Such productions are enhanced in effect by the rediscovery of the means of imparting to the surface a dead black hue, dispensing with the aid of pigments and resistance of oxydation. This hue appears in all the early wrought iron work. Designs, too, may be heightened in effect by combination with copper, blue steel, and also by enameling of accessory ornaments. The leading feature in all the forms is the scroll, whether in concentric lines or spirals, graceful in themselves and pleasingly suggestive of the contrast between present rigidity and past malleability.

As beaten out by the hammer and welded at the forge, artistic articles cannot fail as reminders of the subtle skill brought to bear on their execution. Ponderousness and weight are common associations with iron, but its inherent strength admits of the employment of a minimum of material in securing substantial and serviceable articles. For what can be realized in this metal in the way of elegance and refinement of form, we may refer to the productions of all periods in the art—the Italian Renaissance, when skill in manipulation attained an excellence since unapproached, not only in grilles, railings of shrines, and altars, canopies for the adornment of churches, but in domestic articles embodying often the most delicate forms of ornament, mostly heightened in effect by quaint devices displaying the freedom and ease with which the caprices of fancy might be embodied. The master smiths of that day were emphatically artist workmen, executing the designs committed to them in the spirit in which they had been conceived and encountering technical difficulties as these presented themselves only to overcome them in securing the intended effects. There was life, vigor and individuality in their work. Their interlacings and leafage and flowers were marvels of skill, and their designs are still accepted in the way of suggestiveness for modern work, for modern art has its own ambition in this line and is achieving manifold successes. Current productions for the house comprise such articles as electroliers, electric brackets, mirrors, bells, sconces, vases, easels, flower stands, fine ornaments, etc. As illustrative of modern work, we present a number of designs of recent production noticeable for good artistic expression and the adaptability of the designs to the material. A certain mediæval aspect of no clearly definable style but consorting with the metal, characterizes the work. It will be seen that the grotesque element finds play in the candlesticks. In one of these a griffin holds an

extinguisher on the claw of its right leg, a "righte merrie" conceit, its body besides weighting the article down. The candelabra, with its intertwined branches, is exceedingly graceful; the roses at the upper extremity form sockets, and are balanced by the full grown roses and leaves of the main stem, the lower portion of which in rustic fashion forms the base. The delicacy with which the leaves and flowers have been wrought, and their naturalistic curls, calls attention to the manipulative skill brought to bear on them as shaped on the anvil at a white heat. These leaves are separately formed and then welded by heating and hammering the connecting parts. The leaves adorning the main stem are tastefully disposed. The jardinière which supports a repoussé copper receptacle displays a pleasing treatment of curvilinear band work in the corona as well as in the connections between this and the rim. In the central space of the corona appears, as typifying the purpose of the article, a conventionalized flowering plant, affording a point of rest to the eye in contrast with sinuous and curved bands, and filling in the space. The connection made between the frame and plant is extremely ingenious. The legs are in keeping with the structural character of the design. Here copper is employed for contrast in mass. There is a picturesqueness about the bell suspended in mid air, due to the ornaments with which it is encircled, and the chain composed of twisted stems and leaves alternating with open work. Great beauty is attainable in wrought iron chain supports of chandeliers, formed not only of links and leafage but intertwined stems with various light, small, fanciful, solid ornaments, presenting numerous facets, one object of this diversity being the presentation of numerous points to be struck by the light falling from above, imparting a strangely attractive luster to the dead black hues. Artistic wrought iron fenders, mostly in foliated work, of bars and leaf forms, sometimes with alternating panels and scroll work, the former displaying horizontal and perpendicularly twisted bars, show some of the finest structural works now executed. The andirons that accompany them simulate its ancient methods of enrichment, as in spindle-like forms composed of fine twisted bars that wind spirally and which are welded at their extremities or mounted with mythological animals, such as salamanders, griffins and dragons. The balcony front represents some of the heavier work in ornamental wrought iron. The composition consists of curvilinear bands gracefully intertwining and ornamented with grotesque heads. The andirons of former centuries were of a far more massive character. An old design in wrought iron never loses in effectiveness by being produced on a diminished scale, this showing more refined detail. There is abundant play for such detail in brackets, which may be made to display in miniature all the resources of the art. Charming sconces are also produced.

In addition to articles that naturally come under the category of house furnishings, gates, rails, grills for the upper parts of arch doors, screens, etc., have been wrought in iron with great skill and solidity, the ornamental motives being formed of small bars turned into spiral-like scrolls, throwing off tendrils continually interlacing and crossing each other, forming new spirals and scrolls riveted together with bold flowers and leaves interspersed sometimes with birds, or other animal types, and even with small human figures. Other objects which allowed free scope to the inventive genius and skill of the art worker, where the armatures of walls and the iron work of windows, which, on the ground floor especially, were often completely secured with elaborate screen work. All of the above mentioned articles are however, devoid of delicacy, the mode of decoration being restricted to the hammer and file. In the finer work of the locksmith, we find in vogue through the art of the armorer in the sixteenth century. The structural form and ornament at first possessed Gothic types and features, but these were replaced later by those of the Renaissance. Thus key handles, instead of Gothic rose window tracery, receive pierced ornaments of the characteristic design and sweep of the Renaissance. We cannot withhold our admiration of the creations in ornamental iron work manufactured in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the Italian palaces of that date are still found splendid standards and torch holders, which, without partaking too much of the architectural type of the time, exhibit the style of the period with exquisite beauty of form. Many admirably worked fire-dogs and screens of the sixteenth century, mostly of North Italian and French manufacture, are still extant. Ponderous and massive as these objects are, they are, although blacksmith's work, much more in accordance with the demands of a sound and genuine taste, than the comparatively meagre substitutes of polished or gilt brass, which decorate our modern firesides.



ORNAMENTAL IRON WORK. (SEE OPPOSITE PAGE.)